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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L DUSHANBE 001334

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 9/19/2017

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SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN: IMPRISONED DEMOCRATIC PARTY CHAIRMAN TO BE
RETURNED TO RUSSIA?

REF: 06 DUSHANBE 707

CLASSIFIED BY: TJACOBSON, AMBASSADOR, STATE, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Rahmatullo Valiev, Deputy Chairman of the Democratic Party of Tajikistan, met with the Deputy Chief of Mission September 18. Valiev has been leading the party while its Chairman, Mahmadruzzi Iskandarov, remains in jail in Dushanbe, and met with us to discuss Iskandarov's possible release and return to Russia.

12. (U) On April 16, 2005 Chairman of the Democratic Party of Tajikistan, Mahmadruzzi Iskandarov, was abducted from the streets of Moscow, and then reappeared in Tajikistan, for trial.

The government charged him with terrorism, illegal use of weapons, misuse of state funds, and organizing illegal groups, and sentenced him to 23 years in prison beginning January 2006. Iskandarov alleges he was kidnapped by Russian authorities and forcibly extradited back to Tajikistan where security forces tortured him while in custody. Iskandarov may have committed the crimes the government charged him with; however, the international community, including UN offices, deemed his illegal extradition and subsequent trial through the Tajik justice system as nontransparent and not in accordance with the law. As a popular political party leader, Iskandarov may have posed a threat to President Rahmon or his ruling People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan, and the extradition was likely politically motivated.

13. (C) The government never gave an official response to Iskandarov's accusations. In the September 18 meeting, Valiev produced a 2005 diplomatic note from the Tajik Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the United Nations with an attached document that states that the Russian internal affairs forces officially handed over Iskandarov to Tajik authorities. This admission demonstrates explicit cooperation between Russian and Tajik authorities to effect the extradition. Iskandarov's lawyer in Moscow, Anna Savitskaya, had filed an appeal with the European Court of Human Rights in 2005 over his extradition from Russian. Russia has denied its role in the extradition.

14. (C) Valiev told the DCM that Russian Federal Security Service agents approached Iskandarov's son in Moscow approximately one month ago, and notified him that Iskandarov would be returned to Russia by the end of October. Valiev did

not offer a reason as to why the Russians want Iskandarov back in Russia, but he does not think that Iskandarov would be placed in a Russian jail because there are no charges or warrants for his arrest in Russia. The Democratic Party of Tajikistan has not received any corroborating information from Tajik authorities concerning Iskandarov's release or removal to Russia, but Russian agents told Iskandarov's son that "the question had been settled," indicating that an agreement between Russian and Tajik authorities had been arranged.

15. (C) Valiev asked the DCM if Iskandarov could obtain political asylum in the United States. The DCM explained general criteria for political asylum and noted that the U.S. Embassies in Dushanbe and Moscow could not grant political asylum. The DCM explained the role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in determining refugee status should Iskandarov end up in Moscow, and passed contact information for the Commission's Dushanbe office in case Valiev wished to research this issue further.

16. (C) COMMENT: Iskandarov's return to Russia could lead to his freedom. Both countries may have been feeling international pressure over the past two years to release Iskandarov. The State Department's annual Country Report on Human Rights highlights Iskandarov's case, and Valiev was able to raise it with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights during her visit earlier this year. It is in the Tajik government's interest to wipe their hands of a high profile political detainee. Russia may wish to avoid having to defend the 2005 extra-legal extradition in the European Court of Human Rights. END COMMENT.

JACOBSON